

A Love Song Across the Water by Jay Auris (nighthawkms)

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King, Old Kingdom - Garth Nix

Genre: Angst with a Happy Ending, Canonical Character Death, Character Death Fix, Death is the next grand adventure, Dorks in Love, Epic Friendship, F/M, Love Confessions, M/M, Magic, Post-Canon Fix-It, Stan shows up but I won't promise he lives, Stanley Uris is a Good Friend, You don't have to know a thing about the Old Kingdoms books to understand this fic, no beta we die like men

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Sabriel (Old Kingdom), Stanley Uris

Relationships: Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-10-20

Updated: 2019-12-12

Packaged: 2019-12-13 01:32:06

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 12

Words: 20,197

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

There's far more magic in the universe than Richie Tozier knew about, and Pennywise wasn't the only dangerous thing hidden in Derry. With a sword, some bells, and some luck on his side, Richie will do whatever it takes to save Eddie Kaspbrak, even if he has to travel into Death itself.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

So this fic borrows the magic system and concepts of the afterlife from the Old Kingdoms series. It's a great series I highly encourage you read, but you don't actually need to know a lick about the plot of the books to understand what's going on in this fic.

They don't leave Richie alone that night.

All through the late evening and into the early morning hours, the rest of the Losers take rotating shifts sitting with Richie, relieving one another every two hours. He can't really blame them; Richie would do the exact same thing if he was in their position. Doesn't mean he has to *like* this babysitting. Some alone time would be appreciated, *Jesus*.

They're worried, he knows, that he's going to do something stupid. He's not suicidal, though *some* people (people named Bev, Bill, Ben and Mike) might say that the urge to go digging through the sewers for your best friend's dead body is a suicidal impulse. He's not about to slit his wrists or jump out the window. He's got at least some sense of self-preservation, and... and Eddie would be furious with him for trying. He'd probably say something like *I fucking javelined that clown through the face to save your life and you throw it away less than a day later? Beep fucking beep, asshole*.

Bill sits with him first, cross legged on the bed of Richie's hotel room. He's managed to dig up a pack of UNO cards somewhere in this godforsaken Bates Motel. With the UNO cards, Bill brings two clear glasses and a bottle of Jack Daniels that he judiciously pours, handing a glass to Richie and keeping the bottle on his side of the bed. Smart. If Richie tried to take it or raid the bar downstairs, he'll probably end up getting dragged away (held back, unable to tear away with the house crashing down and Eddie's still in there, they have to go back *no no no don't think about it*).

So, Richie doesn't push it, just deals the cards and downs the glass in one furious gulp before saying, "house rules are we play with number stacking, plus twos can stack into plus fours but not vice versa."

Two hours and fifteen hands later, Richie is regretting the stacking rule because Bill has had uncanny luck with drawing the same numbers. The only reason Richie knows he's not cheating is that Richie is shuffling, and also Richie is abso-fucking-*lutely* cheating, palming plus four cards when he can get away with it.

And yet, when Ben walks in, Bill has just handily taken his tenth win.

"Don't play UNO with him," Bill says on his way out, giving Richie a smile. "He ch-cheats. Although he k-kinda sucks at it, so I g-guess you could anyway."

"Hey, fuck you, man," Richie says, smirking as he collects the cards.

"Eh, I had a better idea," Ben says, tossing a pile of comics onto the bedspread. "You know the shop up on Arbor street is still open? They've branched out into board game sales to stay open." He raises a box in his other hand and shakes it; it's *Settlers of Catan*.

Richie spreads the books out; they're graphic collections of mid-80s runs of X-Men, Iron Man and The Flash. "Shit, man, this is good. Can we do *Catan* first though? I'm gonna be all up in my own head if I'm reading and that road only leads to me crying uncontrollably on your shoulder."

Ben chuckles and slides onto the bed. "Sure, Rich, whatever you want."

Surprisingly, it's *Catan* that leads to Richie sobbing, because Ben makes a remark about how they never had decent board games when they were kids, and then Richie goes off on a tangent about all the shitty 80s board games Eddie insisted they try, and how he'd probably be loving this- and then he can't see because his eyes are filled with tears and Ben's shoulder is a *great* place to cry on (on a side note, holy shit there's some *muscle* in these shoulders, you *hit* that, Bev).

"And h-he was still so f-fucking *short!*" Richie wails. "Like I thought he'd at least h-have one growth s-spurt but c-clearly b-biology wasn't on his side. G-got his mother's genes, n-not mine. Sh-should just get him a ch-child's sized casket."

"I'm sure he'd appreciate that even death could not stop you from you roasting his height and his mom," Ben says, wrapping a comforting arm around Richie's shoulder. "He'd probably get all red and twitchy like he used to, remember?"

"Oh god it was so *cute*, Benjamin," Richie sobs. "I c-couldn't help myself sometimes. I loved riling him up. Y-you know how many teenage f-fantasies I had about him yelling at me while he j-jerked me off?"

"Okaaaay," Ben says heterosexually, patting Richie's hair. "Moving on..."

Richie manages to cry himself to sleep on Ben's shoulder, and he only wakes when Ben shifts off the bed, which means that he was probably sitting up with Richie pressed against him the whole time. Awww, sweet.

"You keep that one," he mumbles to Bev as she slides next to him on the bed. "He's a good boy."

"Planning on it, Tozier," she says. She pulls a lighter seemingly out of thin air and waves a baggie in front of his face. "Come on, let's get wasted."

"Oh, you've always been my *favorite*, Marsh," Richie drawls, taking the baggie and watching her pull out rolling papers.

It takes less than three minutes to put together a decently packed joint. Bev stands up on the bed and disables the fire alarm before they light up.

The weed helps mask the aching hole in Richie's chest, calming his nerves. When he announces he's hungry, Bev sends a text and Ben reappears ten minutes later, throwing a plastic shopping bag with convenience store chips onto the bed before taking a hit of the joint

and saluting them on his way out.

Richie's halfway through a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos when Bev asks it.

"What did you see in the dead lights, Richie?"

Richie pauses mid-crunch, blinking at her. "Wha do vo wamma mow?" he says with a full mouth, chewing and swallowing when she wrinkles her nose in disgust. "Sorry. Why do you wanna know?"

"I had a fucking future premonition of us all dying when I saw them, Rich," she says, tapping the ash from the joint into the wastebasket. "Figured you might have seen something interesting too."

"Yeah, I- gimmie that," he says, taking the joint and another pull. He blows it up towards the fire alarm in a fit of rebellion and is only a little relieved when it doesn't sound. "It wasn't much, I wasn't in there nearly as long as you were."

"You remember anything?" she asks. They're lying next to one another, up against the pillows, and she leans into his side, watching him blow smoke rings after taking another hit. "Not like we need to worry about Pennywise anymore, but it could be helpful."

"There's two things that stick out," Richie says. His stomach turns over as he thinks back on the vision, and he has to take a breath and remind himself that he has no idea what it means. "I remember water. A river, I think. It was grey and kinda tepidly warm and I was wading through it. And, you know, even though it was warm enough, I was just so cold. Like, all over."

"What's the other thing?" Bev asks.

"Bells," Richie says. "I heard bells. Lots of different ones, and every time I heard one it was like being hit with a sledgehammer."

"Weird," Bev says, stealing the joint back. "What do you think it means?"

Funeral bells, is the first thing that pops into his head. But no, that's not right. Not a funeral...but some association with death. He doesn't

know how he knows that.

"No idea," Richie lies. "You gonna finish that?"

Richie falls asleep again while she's there, which is probably good. He was expecting the grief to be so overwhelming as to keep him up for days.

When he opens his eyes, the clock tells him it's been three hours. Mike is sitting in the armchair next to the bed, flipping through an old looking book. He glances over when Richie shifts, yawning and sitting up.

"Morning, sleepyhead," Mike says. "How do you feel?"

"Like I just got the shittiest three hours of sleep in my life," Richie replies, sitting up and stretching. "You guys done with the suicide watch yet? Have I done enough to prove I'm not about to jump off the Kissing Bridge in a fit of despair?"

"That wasn't-" Mike starts.

Richie gives him a look.

Mike sighs. "Look, man. You were inconsolable. We were worried."

"Yeah, well, I made it 'til morning," Richie says. He clasps his hands in his lap, twiddling his thumbs. "So. You guys have all done your duty as fantastic friends. But now it's probably time for me to get in my car and head back to LA."

"I don't know if that's a good idea yet," Mike says cautiously. "You should rest. Recuperate."

"From what?" Richie snorts. "A couple bruises and bumps aren't enough to keep me invalid." Mike is silent long enough that Richie glances up, sees his wary expression. "What, Mike? Spit it out!"

"You loved him, right?" Mike blurts out. "I always thought, maybe, but I wasn't sure, not until yester-"

"Don't," Richie warns. His nails are digging into his palms. Every

ounce of carefree humor is gone from his voice when he says, "Don't fucking start this. I'm barely keeping it together as it is."

"But you did," Mike insists. "I know I'm right."

"Yeah, I fucking did, okay?" Richie yells. The power of his outburst is somewhat aborted by the scratchiness of his barely awake voice. "I fucking loved Eddie for my whole life, even when I didn't remember him. Twenty-seven years, Mike! You know how fucking frustrating that is, being in love with a guy you can't even remember? I thought I was going *crazy*, my brain was telling me that I couldn't be with anyone else because I already had someone, except I couldn't remember him so how could he be real? And then I came back to this backwater town and I remembered him, and all I wanted was to have him in my life again, even as just a friend, and all we had to do was kill that fucking clown before it killed us, but we failed. We failed, and now Eddie's dead. So yeah, I loved him. *So fucking what?*"

Richie is hyperventilating by this point. It's the biggest bitch to realize that he could've really used Eddie and his stupid fucking inhaler right now. He takes big, gulping breaths and presses his palms against his eyes, shaking with fresh grief. He feels like his insides are being pulled out slowly, that hole inside himself grow wider and wider; a chasm, just like under Neibolt. A gaping wound that will never, ever be filled.

He hears Mike shift in the chair. The bed dips, and warm, caring arms wrap around him, pulling him close. Richie shudders and clings and tries not to ruin the shirt of another friend with his snotty tears.

"S-sorry," Richie says. "Fuck, sorry, Mike. I'm just-"

"It's okay," Mike murmurs. "I needed to know it'd be worth taking a risk."

"A risk?" Richie asks, pulling back.

"Bev told me what you saw in the dead lights," Mike explains. "The river and the bells. I don't think it was just a random vision, Rich. It's too convenient. Too coincidental."

"Coincidental? To what?" Richie asks.

"There's more in the Derry library than I told you about," Mike says.
"I have an idea for how to get Eddie back."

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm going to try and post a chapter once every or every other day.

Follow me on tumblr and twitter @nighthawkms.

2. Chapter 2

One mild panic attack (Richie's), one drive thru breakfast (five breakfast sandwiches, three coffees, one tea, and one apple juice for Richie because he is a child), and one car ride (Ben's gorgeous car; God it's such a bitch to be jealous of Ben fucking Hanscom's life) later, the remaining Losers gather up in Mike's loft at the library.

They all stand around the wooden table in the center of the room, watching as Mike carefully lays items across it. First is a wooden box, about the size of a large jewelry box, longer than wide, made of polished mahogany. Next is a leather bandolier, thin but well made, with seven pouches that increase in size incrementally from small to large across the front. Then there's a sword, odd etchings in the steel, gilded at the cross guard in bronze, with a dull green jewel in the pommel. Finally, there's the book Mike was reading, the front cover etched in the same weird runes as on the sword.

"What is all this shit?" Richie asks. "You go antiquing on the weekends, Mike? I think Roadshow wants their merchandise back."

"Is this all from the library?" Ben asks. "This was all here?"

Mike nods. "I think Derry's always been ground zero for a lot of weird stuff. Things just get drawn to this town and collect and never leave. Might be different now with Pennywise gone, but that remains to be seen." He motions to the book. "Richie, can you open that to the first page and read it?"

Richie picks up the book; it's so old, he's afraid he'll split the spine just by opening it, so he carefully turns the cover. In bold lettering, the word *Abhorsen* is written at the top. Richie clears his throat and begins to read the paragraph below.

You who are in possession of this book, tread carefully. The river of death does not tarry with its passengers, nor does it have a fondness for those who wish to ferry those passengers upstream. A man or woman could spend a thousand hours memorizing the information

within, and yet fail at the first attempt to chime a bell. Worse, if the ringer fails to abide by the Charter, that person could doom not only themselves, but those who remain in the land of the living. I have tried, in my role as Abhorsen, to learn more about how the bells work, and have uncovered many new ways to use them. I ascribe my careful research into this volume in order to allow those who have been touched by Free Magic and do not lay claim to the title of Abhorsen to have some use of this power. The power of all magic is fading as this world turns away from the old beliefs. I fear my lineage is coming to an end, and the role of Abhorsen will vanish as the Lesser Dead do into the Ninth Gate. Therefore, I leave these bells to all mankind, in hopes that their magic will still have use to someone who needs it.- S

"What the fuck did I just read?" Richie asks.

"S-something out of a f-fantasy novel," Bill says, turning to Mike. "I'd ask if this was real, b-but we just m-murdered an alien space clown, so I'll b-believe anything at this p-point."

Ben holds his hands out to Richie. "May I?" he asks.

Richie hands him the book, and then starts fussing with the sword instead, lifting it by the handle to test its weight. It's definitely well-made and balanced perfectly in his hand.

Ben carefully flips through the pages, eyes skimming the words. "You've read this whole thing?" he asks, looking at Mike.

Mike nods. "I got bored staying on the lookout for Pennywise, if you can believe it," he says, taking the book as Ben hands it back to him. "Found the book buried in the basement in a chest with the rest of this stuff about five years ago."

"So, what's it for?" Bev asks. She leans over as Mike spreads the book open on the table, studying the complex geometrical drawings on the page he's turned to. "What the fuck is an 'Abhorsen?'"

"From what I gather, it's somebody who can journey into Death,"

Mike says. "They can cross over to the other side and interact with beings in the afterlife."

The sword clatters to the table, and everyone looks to Richie, who is wide eyed and in danger of another panic attack.

"So, you can find Eddie?" Richie yelps. "You could, like, go find his soul and bring it back?"

"Not me," Mike says, shaking his head. "You."

"I don't know the first thing about using this shit!" Richie says. "What am I supposed to do? You're the one who's studied it."

"It's not just about the knowledge, Rich," Mike replies. "Remember, the book said you had to be touched by magic in order to use these powers. I haven't been. You have."

"Oh, *shit*," Bev says, as her eyes flick up in calculation, then back down. "You mean the dead lights, right? Richie and I are the only ones who've been caught in them."

"Exactly," Mike nods. "I think you two are the only ones who are capable of using this stuff, if it even still works at all. But if I'm right, and if we hurry, we can bring Eddie back."

Richie takes a step back and leans against a wooden pole, so his legs don't give out. "*Fuck*," he breathes raggedly, covering his mouth with both hands and screwing his eyes shut. A mixture of relief and terror washes over him.

There might be a way to bring Eddie back. He- he might see Eddie again. Might not have lost him. There's still hope.

But he doesn't know what he's doing; what if he fucks it up? What if whatever he does just makes it worse for Eddie, wherever he is? What if he kills himself trying to do this? Or kills his friends?

Oh, there's that panic attack, he was wondering when it would finally get here.

"Tozier." Bev puts a hand on Richie's back, rubbing in slow circles

while he tries to count his breathing. When he feels like he can control himself, he drops his arms to his sides, and she takes his hand as he opens his eyes. "I'll do it. If it brings Eddie back, I'll help. Do you want to do this? I'll leave it up to you."

"There was never a question, Marsh," Richie says, nodding. "We're doing it. Mike, teach us what the fuck to do."

3. Chapter 3

In the end, the whole procedure seems fairly simple. Which is what worries Richie, because from what it sounds like, they're playing with some very powerful forces, and those just shouldn't be easy to control.

Mike shows them the bells, lying small to large on a velvet bed in the mahogany box. "Pretty sure they're all made of silver or at least coated with it. And the handle's the same color as the box, so probably mahogany. These weren't cheap to make." There's a felt stopper inside each one that prevents the clapper from striking the side. He picks up the smallest one, barely bigger than a pill bottle, and holds it upside down. "Bev, can you read the description of this one?"

Bev has been poring over the pages for the last few minutes and flips back to one with intricate drawings of each bell. She clears her throat. "So, they've got names. This one is Ranna. Says it has a sweet, low sound that brings silence in its wake. That's all. It doesn't really explain the purpose."

"There's a reference number next to it," Mike says. "Turn to that page." He holds the bell out to Richie, who takes it gently, afraid to break something that looks so fragile. It reminds him of something an old Victorian woman would ring to summon her maid.

"Oh, handwriting's different," Bev says when she flips to the correct page. "Same handwriting as the person who wrote the foreword."

"I b-bet the book used to be smaller," Bill says. "Look, these p-pages look newer than the one with the b-bell drawings."

"So, whoever that S guy was probably added all this information to help us," Ben says, nodding.

"Alright, well, according to S... here, I'll quote him."

Ranna is the most forgiving of the bells. If rung properly, it will send all who hear it into slumber, the Living and the Dead alike. A clever wielder can use this bell to subdue the hordes of Lesser Dead and Elementals as they travel through Death, but they must bring proper protection to block the sound, lest they cast themselves into sleep and awake to see their enemy upon them.

Those without practice who wish to wield Ranna should imagine themselves lying on an endless field, under a night sky. Speak the full name of your first love and strike the clapper on the crest of each syllable. You must speak it aloud; your body will feel the vibration of that love on your lips and the sound will ring true.

"I need to point out the fact that there were *hordes* mentioned, and that is disconcerting," Richie says. "Like, to be clear, there's nothing that's gonna stop me from doing this, but we should definitely prepare. Maybe bring some protection; Mike, do you have any guns lying around here?"

"Pretty sure that's what the sword is for, Richie," Ben says, pointing out the obvious. "Shooting a dead thing probably isn't going to work, but maybe that sword can do something to make it, y'know, go away."

"Ben's right," Mike says. "According to the book, Death is a long river, and it's got sections called Precincts that all have different waves and currents, and nine passages between them called Gates. The sword can weaken the dead enough to have them pulled through the next Gate. There are descriptions of the Gates in that book, but if this works the way I hope it will, you'll only have to deal with the first one."

"Works with me," Richie says. "Fuck it, I don't need to know what every one of these stupid bells does, just tell me the ones that will help us get to Eddie."

"Second one," Mike says, lifting it from the box. It's about twice the size of Ranna, but seems just as delicate. "Bev, just read the notes for Mosrael."

"Sure," she says. "So..."

Mosrael is the Waker. The most useful for travel through the Gates, but dangerous if the wielder allows Dead other than the one they wish to hear it. Mosrael, when rung, will cast any Dead who hear it further back towards Life, but drag the wielder further into Death. A Dead soul who has not passed beyond the first Gate will be brought back into their living body, but if they have moved beyond the first Gate, hearing the bell will only pull them into the previous Precinct.

The wielder of this bell must take precaution to have a way back through the Gate they will cross through. They will also be separated from the soul of the Lesser Dead they are attempting to bring to Life, so must ensure it is properly bound or understands how to proceed. Otherwise, it may wander or be pulled back through the Gate.

Those without practice who wish to ring Mosrael should close their eyes and think of one who has passed that they wish to see again. Reach out for them with your free hand, and step forward at the same time while pulling your wielding hand back, allowing the clapper to strike; the strength of your outreach shall determine how far you are cast into Death.

"Hmmm." Bill scratches the back of his head. "S-so, you get what to do, Rich?"

"Uh, I think so. But just to be sure... Mike?"

"Okay," Mike says. "So, Eddie's been dead for less than a day, and the first Precinct of the river isn't supposed to be that strong. So, I'm betting he's still there, and all you have to do is ring the bell, and it will pull him back into his body. Then you'll be in the first Precinct, but since you're still alive, it should be easy to just make your way back out. The living can move freely through the passage from Life to Death. At least according to the book."

"Sounds simple enough," Bev says. She crosses her arms. "So simple that I know something is gonna go wrong. What if he's gone past the first Gate?"

"Then you come back," Mike says. "And we figure out what to do next."

"Yo, so, fuck that," Richie says. "If he's not in the first Precinct, I'm going straight to the second, and then the third, and however fucking many it takes to find him."

"Richie, you can't," Mike explains. "This shit is dangerous. You don't understand the differences between the Precincts and the Gates and you could get caught somewhere you can't get out of. Not to mention all the undead things you might encounter that could pull you farther down the river."

"That's what the book is for!" Richie insists. "You said the book explains all this stuff."

"Reading about it is different than seeing it," Mike counters. "What if there's something down there it doesn't mention? If you come back, you can tell us what you saw, and we can prepare better next time."

"The longer we wait, the further down into Death Eddie could get!" Richie shouts.

"As long as he's not past the Ninth Gate, you can still reach him."

"Oh, that's *reassuring* when we have no idea how far down he's gone. No, fuck that."

"Richie." Ben rests a hand on his shoulder. "Mike's right. We don't want to lose you too."

Richie shakes off his hand, glaring. "Et tu, Benjamin? If it was Bev, would you be telling us to be cautious? We threw caution to the wind when Pennywise took her, we weren't dragging our feet like this!"

"Tozier, calm down," Bev snaps, clearly irritated. She looks to the rest of the group. "I promise I'll keep him alive."

"See, I only suggested this because I knew Bev would be with you," Mike says, folding his arms. "She's smart enough to drag your ass back out if needed. Anyway, you can't go yet, so you might as well start studying; it'll save us time if we do have to regroup and try again."

"What's s-stopping us, Mike?" Bill asks. "We sh-shouldn't waste any

more t-time."

"I know, Bill," Mike says. "But we can't bring a body back to life without a body."

Notes for the Chapter:

Heyyy hope everyone is enjoying so far, and that everything makes sense! I tried to avoid too much info-dumping early on in the fic; Richie doesn't have time for that shit and neither do you ;)

4. Chapter 4

Richie's hands are shaking as he tries to light a cigarette. One flick of the lighter, then another, then another, but he can't seem to keep the flame alive.

Lots of things he can't keep alive, lately.

"*Shit, fuck,*" he curses, biting down on the cigarette.

"Here." A smaller hand tugs the lighter from between his fingers. Bev flicks the side with a firm, sure grip, and the flame bursts out. She cups her hand around it, and Richie mumbles a thanks as he thrusts the end of the cigarette into the flame and lights it.

He leans his elbows on the railing of the balcony. It's on the third floor of the library, and overlooks a pretty section of the town, forest trees in the distance. People are milling about on the streets as the sun breaks over the horizon.

Richie takes a drag of the cigarette, sucking deeply and letting the smoke curl out of his mouth and nose.

A slumbering dragon, that's what Eddie said he looked like when they smoked as kids. Something dangerous if awoken.

"You should get some sleep," Bev says, waving his hand away when he offers the cigarette. "Maybe I could practice with that little bell on you. God knows you need it."

"I doubt even magic could pull me under at this point," Richie says, flicking the ash over the balcony; if it lands in the hair of a dude with a *Keep Christ in Christmas* bumper sticker on his open top truck, well, he'll be none the wiser until he looks in a mirror. "The other guys left, yeah? We should've gone with them. Even three burly boys like them will have trouble dragging a body out of the sewers. If there's anything left of him after that cave-in."

He stubs the cigarette out on the railing and flicks it over the edge, turning and walking back inside.

Bev follows him. "You know that would have been a terrible idea. You're barely keeping it together as it is, and you need rest for what's next. They're doing their part, and we owe it to them to be ready for ours."

"I'm not going back without him, Bev," Richie says, crossing over to the wooden table and leaning on the edges. The sword catches a ray of sunlight through the window, glinting and casting light on the far wall in the shapes of the etched symbols. Richie picks it up by the handle and gives it a swing to test it out. He's never done a day of sword-fighting in his life, he's not *that* much of a nerd (and also he's too much of a coward to show his face at a LARPing event), but the blade feels comfortable in his hand, slicing easily through the air.

Bev leans against the long side of the table, watching him. "So, no matter what we do or say, you're gonna do exactly what you want to."

"Oh, I'll play it up for the guys," Richie says, swinging again as he affects a false voice. "*Of course Mike, you're absolutely right, I'll definitely turn around and march right back.*" He shrugs and lowers the sword. "But I figure since you're coming with me, I owe you the truth. I don't expect you to follow me. You've got someone here to come back to, a whole life ahead of you."

"And you don't?" Bev frowns.

"I mean, I kinda torpedoed my career by bombing my latest taped special; I doubt Netflix will be too happy. And the only person I've ever loved romantically is floating down the fucking river Styx. Like, I love you guys, but Eddie..."

He doesn't have the words for how he feels about that man. How he's always felt about him. Just his luck, pining over the ghost of a memory and then having it again before it slipped through his fingers forever.

Richie holds the sword out, and Bev takes it, her soft fingers winding through his momentarily before he pulls away. He steps back, and despite their difference in size and how the blade felt weighted perfectly for him, she seemingly has no trouble taking a swing,

pulling up with a twirling flourish.

"Fighting with this thing has gotta tire you out quickly," Bev says. "We'll trade off. One of us with the bells and one with the sword."

"You say that like you expect to use the fucking thing," Richie says.

"If we're going to be traveling together, then I'm sure I'll have to," Bev says.

Richie frowns suspiciously. "And how far are we gonna travel together, Marsh?"

"As far as we have to," Bev says. There's a fire in her eyes, a zeal, a determination. No wonder she's a force to be dealt with in the fashion industry, with a fire like that in her. "You're right, Rich. You all risked everything to come save me; Eddie had a fucking broken arm and still scrambled his ass down a sewer to fight Pennywise. What kind of friend would I be if I didn't fight for him too? So I'm not leaving until I find him."

"Right on, Marsh!" Richie grins, pumping his fists. "Fuck yes, I knew you were still a rebel. Punk as *fuck*."

Bev smirks. "Like I was gonna let you have all the fun without me, Tozier. On one condition, though. You get enough rest so I don't have to drag your half-asleep ass down a goddamn river."

"Deal," Richie says. "Get the fucking bell."

5. Chapter 5

It's a hopeful sign that, when Richie lies down on Mike's bed and Bev plugs her ears and tells him to close his eyes, he opens them again when the sun is low on the opposite horizon. Apparently magic bells are a cure-all for insomnia, even at his medically-diagnosable level. He's gonna have to ask Mike if he can keep that bell when he leaves.

Richie steps out into the hall on the second floor and shuts the door quietly. There's shuffling overhead, and a murmuring noise. He ascends the stairs, and when the third step up squeaks, the voices grow quiet. Footsteps come towards the landing.

Bill meets Richie there, silhouetted in lamp light. He's covered in dust and grime and has scratches on his hands but looks no worse for wear.

"H-Hey, Richie," he says, standing in the doorway. "You sh-should go back down, we're s-still working up here."

Richie can see Mike and Ben and Bev's behind Bill, all looking warily at Richie. Like they're expecting him to snap at any moment.

Fuck that, he's not made of glass. He can handle this.

"I want to see him," Richie says firmly. "Let me see him."

Bill frowns "R-Richie, I'm not sure that's w-w-wise..."

"Bill." Richie gives him a level look. "I have to. Please."

"It's okay, Bill," Bev calls softly. "Let him come in."

Bill wavers for a moment in the doorway, before sighing and stepping aside.

Behind him, there's a long white sheet covering the shape of a body on the wooden table.

Richie sucks air through his teeth, gripping the edge of the door jamb and swallowing. *C'mon Tozier. You've got this.* He pushes off the door

and moves past Bill.

The rest of the Losers move closer as Richie comes to stand by the side of the table. He can see the outline of a face beneath the sheet. The room is unsettlingly silent.

"Take it off," Richie murmurs.

Ben comes up beside him, laying an arm across his shoulders. "Are you sure?"

Richie nods. "Mmmm."

Bev comes to Richie's other side, curling her arms around his elbow and resting her head against his shoulder.

Richie glances at Mike, who stands at the head of the table. Mike nods once, then grabs the sheet and pulls it down.

Oh.

There Eddie is.

Eyes closed. Skin pale and grey and smooth. His hair is neatly brushed and free of dust. His lips are closed, still, no breath blowing through them.

He looks like he could be asleep. Peaceful.

Something in Richie snaps.

"Woah, *woah*, buddy," Ben says as Richie buckles. Quickly, he grabs Richie by the waist to keep him upright. Richie lets out a broken sound and bows in on himself, curling his arms to his chest. Bev twists around to wrap Richie in a gentle hug, and he presses his face into her shoulder, shuddering and shaking with full-bodied sobs. Bill and Mike are there moments later, gathering around them.

It's like the reservoir all over again. All of them, holding him together while he falls apart.

"*I'm sorry, Eds, I'm sorry!*" Richie gasps, choking words out through the

tears. "*I'm s-so sorry!*"

"Shhhh, hey, breathe, Richie, breathe," Bev murmurs in his ear, rubbing a hand up and down his back. "It's not your fault, not your fault..."

Richie doesn't believe her. It's as if all the progress he's made in the last twenty-four hours is gone, leaving him unable to hold the weight of his guilt, his grief.

Richie cries for what seems like hours. It feels like everything wants to pour into him and out of him all at once, like he's caught in the dead lights again, drowning in the mute grey water of a river that doesn't exist on this plane.

It didn't seem real without the body. There's a part of him that thought Eddie might just walk back in the door at any time, grinning and flipping them off, giving them shit for leaving him in the cave, like *what the fuck's the matter with you all, leaving me down there? Can't you see I'm just fine?*

But Eddie's dead. Eddie's dead and it's Richie's fault and he's not okay. There's this hollow place in his chest where Eddie resided, and now it's empty and it hurts, *so much*.

He keeps his face buried in Bev's shoulder, soaking the fabric of her blouse with his tears. That's like, the *third* friend's shirt he's ruined in twenty-four hours. *Fuck*.

But Bev makes no move to push him off, and his friends holds him close long past when his breathing settles and he stops shaking.

"Do you need us to cover him back up?" Mike asks, after the silence becomes too much for all of them to bear.

Richie sniffs, lifting his head off Bev's shoulder. He looks down at Eddie again. A painful despair still tears through his chest, but this time he's not so overwhelmed. He hates looking, but he isn't about to collapse again.

"No, it's- it's cool, man," Richie says. "Think I'm okay now. He, uh, looks pretty good, actually. Wait- where's the stab wound Bowers

gave him?"

Eddie's cheek is completely smooth, not a scratch on it.

"We were busy while you were asleep," Ben says, his arm still over Richie's shoulder. "Mike knew some useful stuff."

"That book is more than just about the bells," Mike says. "There's spells in there too. I guess whoever the Abhorsen were, they used magic. I found one to heal a vessel to its original state. No point in putting a soul back in a body that's just going to die again."

He lowers the sheet farther, all the way down Eddie's chest. There's a gaping hole through the middle of his shirt, right where Pennywise's claw impaled him, but instead of blood and guts, Richie sees whole, smooth skin unmarred by any injury.

"Mike, you think maybe any of this shit would have been useful when we were fighting a fear-eating space clown demon?" Richie asks rhetorically.

"Maybe. Or maybe it could've blown up in our faces and we'd all be dead," Mike retorts. "I felt like mixing two impossible supernatural mythologies was pushing our luck."

"No point in arguing over it now," Bev says. "We've got work to do."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hashtag sorry not sorry for all that pain :D

6. Chapter 6

They have no idea how even a few minutes in Death will be, so even though they only plan to be there a short time (or at least Mike, Ben and Bill think that), they decide to take a few supplies.

"Anything that's on your person will travel with you," Mike explains as Richie hoists a backpack over his shoulders. Inside are two coils of rope, water bottles and granola bars, a switchblade, a waterproof flashlight with a spare set of batteries, flares, a pack of earplugs, and a walkie talkie- they have no idea if the last one will work across the barrier, but Bev has an identical set of items in her backpack, so they should at least be able to communicate if they lose track of one another. Richie grips the sword in one hand, and Bev has the bandolier across her chest, the bells tucked safely into the pouches with the felt stoppers still inside. The book is sealed in the largest plastic zip bag they could find at the supermarket and fits snugly in the other large pocket of Richie's bag.

"Okay, s-so let's review," Bill says, standing in front of Richie and Bev with folded arms, a serious frown on his face. He fails to carry a disciplinarian's stance, too gentle and sympathetic, so he just looks like a petulant teenager. Richie wants to pinch his cheeks and tell him to lighten up. "What are you g-guys gonna do?"

"We ring the bell together," Bev says.

"We search the whole first Precinct," Richie continues. "If Eddie isn't there, we assume he's either been sent back to Life or is farther down. If we do find him, we send him back, and then immediately go back through the first Gate."

"Either way, we come back," Bev finishes.

Ben gives them both a thumbs up. "You're gonna do great," he says. "No two people I'd rather trust."

Richie snorts. "That's a bald-faced lie. Mike is at least thirty percent more trustworthy than me. And Bill is a fucking Boy Scout."

Bev punches Richie gently in the shoulder. "Zip it, Tozier," she says as he pretends to be in grievous pain, making contorted faces that leave Bill laughing. "Ben's trying to be supportive."

Ben smiles at her and leans in for a kiss; Richie mutters something about *fucking straight people* under his breath, so she flips him off.

"We'll make sure nothing happens to your bodies," Mike says as Bev removes the bell Mosrael from its pouch. "If Eddie does wake up before you two, it's gonna be a hell of a time explaining what's going on."

"Please don't let him draw obscenities in permanent marker all over my face while I'm asleep," Richie says. "I know the asshole will want to, and you might even want to let him, but *resist that urge*."

"I'm s-sure you two can discuss that when you're b-both together again," Bill says, squeezing Richie's shoulder. "Good luck, man. You can d-do this."

"If you let Bev die in there Rich, then don't come back, 'cause Ben will definitely kill you," Mike says, far too cheerfully. "Seriously though, you guys have got this."

A silence comes over them as Bev removes the plush stopper from the bell, carefully gripping the clapper between two fingers. She lowers her arm, and Richie's hand follows it, curling around the mahogany handle, which is warm and feels supple under his fingers. When he has a good grip, arm resting at his side, he feels her release the clapper. It now hangs freely of its own weight, ready to ring. Bev wraps her hand around his on the handle, and they look at each other for reassurance before closing their eyes.

"One..." Bev counts.

"Two..." Richie follows.

He tries to hold onto the last happy image of Eddie he has- smiling beautifully above him, hair mussed, eyes wide with glee, high off the energy from killing the clown. God, Richie wanted to kiss him in that moment. Just reach up and pull him down and say in a press of lips

what he's been unable to say all this time.

I love you, I always have, I'll always be yours, please take me.

Maybe if he had...

"Three," Bev says.

Richie reaches for Eddie behind closed eyes, swinging his foot forward and his arm back. The clapper strikes the bell and the ringing is so loud, harsh in his ears, and it goes on for ages and ages, or maybe only a moment.

The echoes of the noise are drowned out by a sudden rush of water, and the pull of a strong current around his legs forces Richie to dig his feet into what feels like sand to prevent himself from being dragged forwards.

Richie's eyes pop open. All he can see is grey mist, grey water. He can't tell where the sky ends, and the sea begins.

Wait, not a sea. A river. So wide, it's impossible to see the edges through the mist. Richie looks behind him, and in the far distance, the horizon is cut through by an endless yellow glow that the headwaters of the river rush through.

Richie's still gripping Bev's hand, both of them holding the bell that thankfully cannot sound underwater. It makes sense, then, that S told them to do this, hold the bell this way. If the water didn't prevent the sound, they might have accidentally rung the bell a second time and been pulled farther down the river.

Bev is struggling to stay upright; the water is as high as Richie's hips, but they hit her right across the chest. He almost loses her for a second, and she clings to him as he wraps an arm around her waist.

"Hold the bell clapper, we'll put it away in a second," Richie says, carefully taking steps in the direction of the current. "I think downstream the water is calmer."

The rushing of the headwaters slows the farther they walk away from the horizon. When the water reaches knee height and Bev finds she

can stand steadily again, she carefully hands the bell to Richie, who dries it off with the top of his plaid shirt and slips the plush stopper back in. He feels tension in his chest release as Bev slides the bell back into the bandolier; he's never been so intimidated by goddamn orchestral instruments.

With the bell safely tucked away, they take a moment to breathe and have a look around. Truly, they can't see a damn thing more than fifty feet to their right or left. Richie gets the feeling that if he were to pick either of those directions and start walking, the universe would end before he found a side.

The glowing horizon is still visible behind them, and before them, the river flows, twisting away, the edges disappeared into the fog.

"Well, we made it here without dying," Bev says. She wipes grey water off her face with the very small dry part of her T-shirt, and motions behind them. "Gonna assume that's the way back. How the hell are we gonna ford that?"

"We'll figure that out when we find Eddie," Richie says. He hefts the sword out of the water; it takes a hell of a lot of energy, but when it splits the surface the pull of the current disappears, and he can easily rest the blade on his shoulder. "He's probably farther down. Come on."

They've made it into Death. Now they just need to find Eddie and get the fuck back out. Piece of cake.

7. Chapter 7

The current of the river of Death never entirely subsides, but occasionally gets shallow enough that Richie can see the pale grey sand that they walk on. There's very little definition to the river, other than the outcroppings of rock that break the surface and cause water to splash up higher. Richie avoids stepping near them. He's managed so far not to get any grey water in his mouth, and he plans on keeping it that way. God knows what drinking water from the river of Death will do to his insides. Probably worse than that one time he got food poisoning at a TGIFridays.

"Did Mike say how long the first Precinct is?" Bev asks. She's constantly moving her head, eyes roving for a hint of any danger. "Or what kinds of things we might run into?"

"He didn't give me a lot of detail," Richie says. "Basically, if I see something, hit it with the sword and run."

"Fantastic," Bev sighs. There's a large outcropping coming up on their left, and she motions to it. "Let's rest there and check the book. Maybe we'll find something to help us."

They climb up onto the rocks, careful not to slip and slide back into the water. Richie pulls the walkie talkie out of his bag and tries picking up a signal from the guys, but only gets static. Of course, they couldn't be that lucky. Meanwhile, Bev carefully removes the book from the zip bag and opens it, resting it on her knees and looking through it. Richie sits on the rock beside her, watching her flip the pages.

"Hey, let's look at the entries on the other bells," Richie says. "Maybe one of them can help locate a soul on the river."

"Mmmm, okay." Bev turns the pages towards the back, finding S's added entries. "So, the other bells are called... Kibeth, Dyrin, Belgaer, Saraneth, and Astarael."

"Anything sound promising?" Richie asks. He skims his eyes over the entry for Kibeth... the Walker... contrary... may let you command the

Dead, but may pull you beyond the next gate... Nah, they're not trying to control Eddie, they're trying to find him. Next is Dyrim... return voice to the Dead or still a careless tongue... not really helpful either. Maybe Belgaer... tricksome... restore or erase the personhood of a soul... or perhaps Saraneth... force the listener to yield to your will... again, can't force Eddie to do anything like go back to Life if he isn't here. And what about Astarael? Well... the Weeper, throws all who hear it farther into Death, including the wielder...

"I don't see anything that could help," Bev says, frowning. "Frankly, some of these are too dangerous for us to even attempt."

"Great," Richie says. "So the bells are useless. Well, what about the sword?"

"Hmmm... is there an entry- oh, here." Bev opens to a page with the sword drawn expertly on the top, and more scriptive writing from S at the bottom. "Okay. Well, it says here that those etchings on the sword will glow when one of the Dead is close by. That's a start. If it glows blue, it's one of the lesser Dead, and red means greater Dead."

"So basically if it's blue, we go towards it, and if it's red, we run the fuck away," Richie says. "Cool, well, that's something, at least." Who knows if Eddie is the only lesser Dead soul around these parts. Or if he's even here. Richie feels like he should be; Mike had said that restless souls of the lesser Dead who die violently tend to cling on longer, are less likely to let the current take them. Eddie has always been restless, and died violently.

"There are dozens of spells in this thing, Tozier. Might be worth taking the time to learn some of them to defend ourselves." Bev clears her throat and points down at the water. "*M'hau*," she says, clearly and confidently. The water splits in two as a gust of wind slices through it, going still again moments later.

"Not really interested in your Harry Potter bullshit," Richie says, standing up. "I just want to know whatever I need to find Eddie. Tell you what, you keep learning spells and I'll wave the sword around. We'll make a dream team."

They take a moment to scarf down a granola bar and share a bottle of

water; the rush of fighting the current takes its toll on a body. Richie is a live wire of worry; every moment they dawdle is another moment that Eddie might get dragged further into Death. He almost loses his footing climbing off the rocks, and Bev grabs his arm and tells him *breathe* and he forces himself to stop and do so. He's no use to Eddie if he brains himself on a boulder. Then they'll just both be stuck here.

After a few more minutes of walking, the edge of the river comes into view through the fog. The water rises a bit as it crashes over the rocky edge, and as they get closer, they can see it disappearing downwards, falling off into more grey mist.

"Waterfall?" Richie asks.

"Betting this is the first Gate that Mike was talking about," Bev says. She looks behind them, frowning. "We didn't see anyone in the whole Precinct, doesn't that strike you as odd? Shouldn't the river of Death have more, y'know, dead things in it?"

"The fuck if I know, Marsh. Not like I come here often." Richie peers over the edge, trying to spot anything through the mist and coming up empty. "We need a safe way down there. It could be all rocks at the bottom."

"Think I saw an entry in here about the Gate," Bev says, scanning through the book.

"Hey, just a reminder, don't drop that thing, if we lose it we are completely fucked."

"You think, Tozier?" Bev snarks. "Okay, here. Yeah, looks like this is the Gate, and to go down, we need to make a path..." She traces a finger in whorls across the page, muttering under her breath. Richie jumps back as the center of the waterfall parts in two, and a staircase made of water slowly appears, leading downwards.

"You did that?" Richie asks. "Wow, look at you. Real Hermione Granger over here."

"Yeah, well, that sword makes you Neville fucking Longbottom then.

Shitty at magic but occasionally good at hitting things."

"I can't be insulted, that kid turned out to be a looker. You calling me hot, Marsh?"

"In your dreams, Tozier. Come on, I don't know how long this will last."

The stairs are surprisingly sturdy and not slippery for being made out of water. The bottom is also a lot closer than he thought; probably no more than fifty feet below. As soon as he steps off the last stair, the waterfall closes around them.

"Hope that spell works as well from down here as it did up there," Richie says, looking up. "Can't imagine climbing back up."

"Richie." Bev's voice is low and cautious. She's staring at the sword. "Look."

He glances down. The etchings on the sword are glowing red.

"*Fuck*," Richie hisses, gripping the hilt between both hands and looking around frantically. The fog is just as thick down here, so he can't see more than ten feet ahead of him. The current is also stronger, and the sound of it makes it hard to detect any noises further down the river.

They both stand frozen for minutes, barely daring to breathe. Richie swears he hears a low chuckle at one point- no. That's *impossible*. His mind is just playing tricks on him. They dealt with that problem already. They killed that clown. It's dead.

The glow of the etchings fade, though they don't vanish completely. Richie takes a careful few steps to the right, and watches as the glow fades even more. That's useful. The closer they are to whatever it's detecting, the brighter the glow. So they can use this to track their distance to the thing.

"Bev," Richie mutters. "We're gonna go nice and slow on the right side- What are you doing? Are you *nuts*?" She's pulling the smallest bell Ranna out of its pouch, gripping the clapper between her fingers.

"No, I'm taking a precaution," she whispers. "The earplugs are in the side pocket of the backpack. Get a pair for both of us, and make sure you can't hear a damn thing when you put them in."

It takes him a second, but then he gets it. *Ahhhhh* he mouths at her, carefully working the zipper open as quietly as he can. He fiddles with the plastic package of earplugs, wincing at the *pop!* noise it makes when it opens. He drops four plugs into his palm, closes the pack with another too loud *pop!* and then hands her two before plugging his own ears.

Whatever brand Mike bought, they must be high quality, because once he puts them in, he can't hear a damn thing. He brings his hand up close to his ear, snaps his fingers, and senses the vibrations through his hand but only hears the tiniest, most muddled of noises. Bev gives him a thumbs up and he shoots one back at her.

They move slowly, barely breaking the surface of the river as they trod along. As they go, Richie keeps his eyes moving between the river ahead and the sword in front of him, twisting it from side to side like one big divining rod. Thankfully, the glow continues to fade, so it seems they're moving away from whatever thing that's in here with them. Richie's not really interested in the local flora and fauna, and he'd especially not like to find out what constitutes a 'greater Dead' creature.

Bev's only a few feet ahead of him when it happens; the sand under her feet shifts, and suddenly there's no sand at all as it collapses inwards, creating a large sinkhole. She flings her hands upwards, letting out a soundless cry as her head disappears under the surface, the water twisting downwards.

"*BEV!*" Richie yells, forgetting himself and lunging forwards. He manages to catch her wrist and haul her back up. Her head breaks the surface and she silently sputters and coughs out grey water. Her right hand still clutches Ranna, and she grabs his shirt with her left hand, practically climbing up his body to get out of the sinkhole. Richie drags her farther away, panting at the effort.

They get a few more feet away before they're able to steady themselves.

Are you okay? Richie mouths to her.

Bev nods, still coughing, and slowly mouths back. *That water tastes like ass.*

Richie snorts and pats her shoulder sympathetically. *Better you than me,* he mouths back, pointing at her with the sword.

Bev's eyes widen, and she frantically motions at the blade.

The etchings are burning with a furious red.

Now Richie notices a pounding vibration in the ground. It's getting stronger and stronger. Like something is charging at them.

Oh. Fuck.

Richie groans, twisting around and raising the sword with almost impeccable timing as something far too familiar lunges at him through the mist: a gaping mouth split wide with thousands of teeth and a light. Richie jams his eyes shut - fuck no, he's not getting the dead light treatment again, no fucking way in *hell* - and blocks with the sword, barely staying on his feet as It slams into the blade, and then, finding Itself blocked, flings Itself to the side.

Richie realizes he's got a split second to decide whether it's worth risking a glance or swinging wildly and hoping he hits.

Well, if he's gonna die, might as well go out swinging.

His next swipe hits air.

Richie freezes, waiting for the moment It comes back to eat him... but nothing happens. Slowly, he blinks his eyes open.

The edge of Its mouth disappears under the water ten feet away as It's sucked down into the sinkhole. Richie gapes as Bev grabs his arm, yanking him away and motioning for him to pop out his earplugs.

"What the fuck happened?" Richie asks, stretching his jaw and swallowing to pop his ears.

Bev holds up Ranna, wiggling it before tucking it back in its pouch. "I rang the bell and It went to sleep immediately. Dropped like a stone. I don't know how long the effect of the bell lasts, though. We need to get to the next gate and just go. Hopefully It won't follow."

"This is so fucking unfair," Richie complains, following after her. "We killed it! We fucking killed that asshole and it's still here?"

"We're literally in the realm of Death, Tozier," Bev says, eyes down as she searches the water for any new threats. "Really, we should have expected this."

Richie is starting to panic, gripping his hair as his mind jumps from wild hypothetical to the next. "Eddie died to stop that thing. What if it found him here? What if it, like ate him or something? What if it's controlling him and it's gonna make him attack us?"

"I don't know," Bev says with a grim determination. "But I'll think about that when we're on the other side of the Gate."

Notes for the Chapter:

Yes, I changed the title! The original one felt very filler and not really to do with anything related to the fic.

If it looks like the fic is gaining more and more chapters, it's because I'm trying to fix the flow from part to part and keep needing to divide up bits of my draft. Just means better stuff for ya'll!!

Thanks to everyone who's been reading. I know this is a kinda niche crossover for a fic but every hit, kudos and comment is appreciated :)

8. Chapter 8

Thankfully, they only have to walk for about a minute before the river ends again, this time twisting into a whirlpool that has no visible edges.

"*El gate-o numero dos*," Richie intones. "What's the book say?"

Bev digs it out of her bag, quickly skimming the second entry just to grab the next spell needed. "*Fractu*," she says, spreading her palms wide in concentric circles. Richie watches as the whirlpool freezes and the center cracks open, another set of stairs leading down.

"Come on," Richie says. "I'll take the lead."

Again, the descent is far shorter than Richie imagines it should be. When they step onto the riverbed of the Third Precinct, the water is pleasingly warm, and only ankle-deep, and the current is slow.

"Nice," Richie says. "Best precinct so far, in my humble opinion. You think Eddie might have landed here?"

"Hope so," Bev replies. "Doesn't seem like the worst place to pass the time."

With the water so low, they use less energy and walk faster than they have in the last two Precincts. There's still no sign of Eddie, but no sign of any other Dead either, which means Pennywise didn't follow them. Thank fuck.

Bev pulls the book back out, and turns to the summary on the third Gate. "Another spell," she says, eyes flicking across the page. "Gotta shout this one though, since... oh. Oh *shit*!"

"Marsh? What's wrong?" Richie asks, watching her frantically shove the book back into her bag. He yelps when she grabs his wrist and jerks him forwards into a run.

"That fucking whirlpool, Tozier!" Bev yells. "When it unfreezes, it all comes down into the Precinct!"

There's a rumbling sound in the distance. A great crash, and the sound of rushing water.

"We need to get to the Gate before the wave hits us!" Bev shouts.

"Fuck, fuck, shit! Would have been nice to know that before we got down here!" Richie shouts back. "Of course this was too good to be true! Worst precinct ever!"

They sprint through the water, the rumbling and crashing only growing louder and louder. There's no sign of the fourth Gate ahead, and the roar of the waves is the only thing he can hear.

"Where's the Gate, Bev?" Richie screams. "Where's-"

He's cut off when the water slams into him, instantly dragging him far beneath its massive surface. The pressure of the wave wrenches the sword from his hand before he can even think to hold it tighter, and he is lost, spinning head over foot, unable to tell up from down. Something collides with his shoulder, and a hand grabs his shirt. He hears a muffled shout above the waves; instinctively, he gasps for air after the blow and is instead met with water filling his lungs.

I'm going to die here, he thinks. Guess it doesn't really matter, since I'll just end up right back here.

He only has the energy to struggle for a few moments before darkness overtakes his vision.

~

Richie wakes with an awful start, twisting onto his side as he coughs up foul tasting water. The rocks under his hands are damp, but not under any surface of water.

"Fuck, *breathe*, Tozier." A hand pounds against Richie's back, and then rubs soothing circles as he throws up more water. "Are you okay?" Bev asks when he stops regurgitating.

"God, that water does taste like *shit*," Richie gasps. "You weren't kidding. Is this where all our toilets get flushed to?"

Bev sighs. "Yeah, you're alright. So am I, in case you were wondering."

"You gotta let me get there, Marsh, I can barely breathe right now." Richie wipes his mouth and sits up. They're on another outcropping of rocks in the center of the river. The current is strong again, but the surface is smooth, without a wave in sight. "We got through the gate?"

"Barely," Bev says. "If I hadn't found the spell, we would've slammed into a wall of pretty solid looking mist. And I got lucky with the wave; it pushed me to the surface long enough to get the spell off."

"Fan-fucking tastic," Richie says, clenching and releasing his fists, which ache from gripping the sword so tight- "Oh, shit! I lost the fucking sword! We need to find it. You think it got washed through the Gate like we did?" He scrambles up to look over the rocks into the water, but of course, he can't see shit in the grey water.

"I think we might have to let it go," Bev says. "It's impossible to search this whole Precinct, never mind the whole river. It could've washed all the way down to the ninth Gate for all we know."

"But we need it!" Richie insists. "It's the only way to track Eddie. How the fuck are we supposed to find him without it?"

"I don't know," Bev says honestly. "I really don't, Richie."

"*Fuck.*" Richie tugs his glasses off and rubs a hand over his face. He pushes his hair back, and checks his glasses over carefully. Miraculously, they stayed on his face when he got washed down the river, and they're not even cracked any farther. "You think the other three have figured out what we're doing by now?"

"It's not like they can do anything about it," Bev says, shrugging. Richie crawls over to sit next to her, and she leans into his shoulder. "I'd hate to be in their position. At least we know how badly we're fucking things up. They have no clue."

Richie lets out a hoarse laugh. "Got that right. I lost the sword, we ran into motherfucking Pennywise, and there's no sign of Eddie." He

turns his head, pressing a kiss to the top of her hair. "I'm sorry I dragged you into this, Beverly."

"God, don't call me that. You never call me that. Besides, I don't want your apology." She pulls back to look up at him. "If I knew beforehand what would happen, I'd still choose to be here. We don't leave any Loser behind."

"We left Stan," Richie says. "We failed him. You know, I haven't even thought about him since Eddie died? That's fucking awful."

"You weren't the one who failed him, though."

"What are you talking about?"

"Think about it, Tozier. I was the one who knew how he'd die. How you'd all die. But I didn't say anything." Bev looks down, biting her lip. "Maybe if I'd told you all the truth, we would've found a way to stay together. Maybe Stan wouldn't have been so scared to come back."

"Bullshit. You were just a kid. We all were," Richie says. "You couldn't have known. We basically defeated the greatest threat to Derry, nay, *mankind* when we were like, eleven, and you wanna give yourself shit for not perfectly predicting the future? Come on, Marsh." He thinks he's got a pretty good point here.

"Just because what you say makes sense, doesn't mean I can make myself feel that way," she replies. "If I told you that you had no part in Eddie's death and you can't blame yourself for it, would you stop doing that?"

Richie winces. "Why do you think I blame myself?"

Bev gives him a look. "I don't know, maybe the part where you started *apologizing to his dead body* clued me in?"

"Fair." Richie sighs. Logically, he knows that he couldn't have foreseen what happened to Eddie. The deadlights weren't so kind to him as to Bev; they only showed him the future from after Eddie died. But if he had just been a little faster, a little braver... Maybe things would be different.

Bev lets out a low chuckle. "We're both so messed up, aren't we? Sometimes I worry Ben's going to look at me and realize he doesn't want to deal with all this crazy."

"No more crazy than the rest of us, Marsh," Richie says. "We spent our childhoods haunted by an evil space clown who stole our memories so that we couldn't rely on each other as adults. I drink too much and let other people write shitty low-brow material for me and spent years seducing twinkies with short brown hair who talk fast without even knowing why I wanted that."

"You seduced *them*, Tozier?" Bev nudges his shoulder, smirking. "Is that how it really went?"

"Oh, fuck off," he says, grinning and nudging her right back. "There are some guys who actually wanna hit this, hard as it is for you to believe."

"Yeah, but unfortunately for them, there's only one guy you want." Her smile gets softer, fonder. "Eddie's lucky to have you. I mean it, Richie."

"Okay, this has gotten too 'very special episode' for me," Richie says. He stands up, holding a hand out to Bev. "Come on. Let's go find that lucky son of a bitch."

The fourth Precinct seems as empty of life as the other three before it. They wade quietly through the knee-high water; Richie is tempted to call out, but even though the place looks deserted, they don't have any way of knowing that without the sword, so better to not attract attention.

"You know, maybe we're doing this wrong," Bev says as they walk. "Maybe we were supposed to go farther east or west. What if the river isn't as infinite as it seems?"

"And what if it is? What if we wander and wander and get lost and never find our way back to the Gate?"

"We'd just follow the current, wouldn't we?"

"Who the fuck knows? This place is weird and illogical. Hold up."

Richie stops, grabbing Bev's shoulder. "Look."

Another outcropping of rock is outlined in the fog ahead, no different than any of the others, except there's something moving on top of it. It looks small, vaguely humanoid, but the fog is still too thick to make out features.

"Should I pull out Ranna?" Bev murmurs. "What if It followed us through the gates?"

"No, wait..." Richie frowns. There's something familiar about the top of its head... like a waterfall of curls... "Oh, *shit*!" he gasps, bolting forwards.

"Richie, wait!" Bev yells, lunging after him.

The humanoid figure freezes, seemingly having heard them. Richie only has to run a little for the fog to finally break, and to recognize the familiar, yet also unfamiliar figure standing on top of the rocks.

"Richie Tozier." Stan smiles at him, tall and lean and instantly recognizable despite not having seen him for nearly three decades. "You came."

"Shit, Stan," Richie says. "You got hot too? How am I the only one who aged poorly?"

Bev lets out a joyful cry and scrambles up the rocks, barreling into Stan and wrapping him in a tight embrace. Richie isn't far behind, pulling them both into a bone-crushing hug, laughing with a deep relief.

Stan, they fucking found Stan! When they weren't even trying! When he's been dead for even longer than Eddie! Wait, does that mean they've gone too far down river?

"Hey, man, it's great to see you," Richie says, pulling back and grinning at him. Bev isn't letting go yet, and Stan doesn't push her to, letting her squeeze him like he's an orange she's trying to get the last bit of juice out of.

"I'm not sure I can say the same," Stan replies. "If you're both here..."

but you don't *feel* dead."

Richie shakes his head. "We're not. So, a quick recap. We totally fucking murdered that asshole Pennywise, you should've come, it was a blast. Unfortunately, while doing that, the fuckhead murdered Eddie. So, we came to get him back. We broke through the barrier between Life and Death; you'd be amazed at what kind of weird magic shit Mike found in the Derry library."

"Okay," Stan says. "That's a lot to process, but now I get why Eddie's the way he is right now."

"Wait, do you know where he is?" Richie asks. His heart leaps into his throat when Stan nods. "Fuck, Stan, you rule! Well, let's go get him! Man, I can't wait to see the look on his face when that little shit sees us."

Stan frowns. "Richie, do you know what Eddie is... what he's like right now?"

Richie's stomach drops, an icy fear creeping up his spine. "I mean... I know he's dead?"

"That's not..." Stan sighs. "Come on, let me show you."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey all, sorry for dropping off the face of the earth with this fic for like 2 weeks :D Life happens! But I'm going to try and keep on top of this to have it finished by the end of the month.

9. Chapter 9

Eddie's a little farther downstream, about a hundred feet before a short waterfall which is probably the next Gate. He's sitting on another outcropping, gazing out across the water. Richie takes off in a run again when he recognizes Eddie's small figure.

"Eddie!" Richie shouts, gasping and scrambling towards him. "Yo, shithead, bet you never thought you'd see my ass again!"

Eddie doesn't move, doesn't even look towards him. He's unnaturally still, hands lying limply in his lap, legs dangling in the water. As Richie gets closer, he can see Eddie's eyes better, and the glassy, lifeless look in them.

Richie comes to a stop in front of him, panting. He reaches out, gripping Eddie's shoulder and shaking it gently. "Eds?"

No response. Eddie doesn't even react to his voice. His face is slack, whole body barely staying upright, like a puppet waiting for someone to pull its strings and bring it back to life.

Bev reaches them and stands next to Richie. "What's wrong with him?" she asks, watching Richie grab both of Eddie's shoulders and shake.

"I don't know," Richie says. "Eds, come on, man. This isn't funny!"

Stan climbs onto the rocks, kneeling besides Eddie. "This is how he's been the whole time. I spotted him floating down the river and grabbed him before he went over the waterfall, but when I pulled him out, he didn't recognize me. Didn't say anything, and he only moves when someone guides him." As if to demonstrate, when Richie stops shaking him, Eddie falls forward, his forehead coming to rest on Richie's shoulder.

"Shit- no, this isn't happening." Richie pulls Eddie back upright and cups his cheeks, staring into eyes that don't stare back. "Eddie, come on, where are you? Wake up, you asshole! I drag my ass all the way down into Death to find you and you check out of the party early?"

"Stan, were you like this after you died?" Bev asks. "Can you remember?"

"I don't think so," Stan says. "I remember being awake and cognizant the whole ride down. I just barely caught myself before I went over the falls and I've been on this level ever since. Haven't found much of anything except rocks."

"Eds, Eds!" Richie shouts. He's breathing hard, chest twisting and tightening as the cruel reality threatens to split him open again. "No, no no *nonononono* COME ON!"

This can't be happening. They fucking followed Eddie into the afterlife, so how is he not even here?

"Richie..." Bev touches his shoulder. "Do you think maybe, Pennywise?"

"I thought he was dead," Stan says.

"He is, so *of course* we fucking ran into him down here!" Richie says. "What are you saying, Bev?"

"Pennywise, he- like you said. We only got away from him because we had the weapons to fight him off. Eddie didn't."

"So what are you saying? He, like, ate Eddie's personality?"

"I don't know." She's got tears at the edges of her eyes. "But I don't think Eddie's with us anymore."

"Don't cry, Marsh, don't you fucking dare!" Richie shouts at her. "You don't get to give up on him that easily!"

"Richie, hey, you need to breathe," Stan says, touching his shoulder.

Richie flinches away, pulling Eddie with him, catching him around the waist. Eddie slumps lifelessly against his chest. An empty, hollow vessel where a person once resided.

Suddenly Richie is sobbing, like a fucking hypocrite. God damn it.

"You *can't* be gone!" he cries, wrapping his arms tight around Eddie, one hand cupping the back of his head.

Now Richie realizes how cold Eddie feels.

"No- no, *please*, Eddie. Please. Please don't go. I need you with me! I l-love you, man, I fucking love you... P-please..."

Eddie can't hear him. Eddie never got to know how much he was loved.

Bev and Stan remain silent as Richie cries and pleads, his brain whirling through grief and stubborn denial, because no, there's got to be a way, there's *got* to be.

There is.

"W-wait," Richie says, sniffing. "Bev. Get out the book. The bells, there's one... I can't fucking remember which."

Bev hops up onto the rocks next to Stan, pulling her backpack off and carefully tugging out the book. "Which one?" she asks, opening to a dog-eared page. "We've still got, um, Kibeth, and Dyrim..."

"What are you both talking about?" Stan asks. "What have bells got to do with anything?"

"Shut up, Uris," Richie barks. "No, it's not those, Bev, keep going."

"Okay, then there's Belgaer-"

"That one!" Richie says. "Read the entry on that one."

Bev nods at him and clears her throat.

Belgaer is the bell that necromancers most hate to use, because it has a mind of its own. Known as the Thinker, this bell is capable of restoring the memories, thoughts and personality of a Dead being if rung correctly. However, ring this incorrectly, and those who hear it will have those same memories, thoughts and personality erased, never to be restored.

I have used this bell only a few times, with good reason. The danger that lies with use of this bell cannot be understated. It should not be used except in the most dire of circumstances, for it is the only bell truly capable of destroying a soul wholly and completely without passing beyond the Ninth Gate.

For those who dare and have no practice, picture the sweetest memory of the person you wish to restore, or the worst memory of the person you wish to destroy. Let that memory fill your heart with pure love or pure hatred, and that feeling will guide your hand.

"Give me the bell, Marsh," Richie says when she's finished.

Bev and Stan look at each other, and then back at Richie.

"What?" Richie asks. "I don't want to hear whatever shitty arguments you have about why I shouldn't do this, or how it's dangerous or I'm not in the right mind or whatever horseshit you're about to say. Give me the fucking bell."

Bev reaches into the fifth pouch on the bandolier. The bell is much larger than the first two, at least twice as heavy, and when she puts it in his palm, it feels warm, crackling with energy. Richie swears it's staring at him, which should be impossible, since, y'know, it doesn't have eyes.

"Both of you, scram," Richie says. "I don't want you anywhere near this when I ring it. Put some earplugs in too, just in case."

"What is he talking about?" Stan asks.

"I'll explain as we walk," Bev says, jumping down off the rocks. She leans forward, going up on her tiptoes to press a kiss to Richie's cheek. "Don't you dare fuck this up, Tozier. Give us two full minutes before you ring it."

"Be careful, Richie," Stan says. "Can't catch up with you if you fuck yourself up with weird magic shit."

"And put in some fucking earplugs too!" Bev calls back.

"Right on it!" Richie lies, like a liar.

When they've both disappeared through the fog, Richie pulls himself onto the rocks and guides Eddie's body up out of the water to lean back against a tall outcropping. Eddie's chest moves up and down, breathing softly, and he blinks in a regular pattern, but those are the only real signs of life in him.

Richie sits down beside him, cupping the bell in his palms resting in his lap. He needs to wait until Stan and Bev are far enough away, so he's got some time to kill. "Hey, hey Eds. I guess, since you can't really hear me right now, I can confess some things. You know how I was a total fucking shitheel to you all the time, always teasing you for being so short and angry- like how does that much rage fit in a body so small, I don't even understand- and, you know, pinching your cheeks and calling you Eddie Spaghetti? Like some fucking schoolyard crush?" He sighs. "So, about that... I really did have a crush."

Of course, Eddie doesn't answer. Good. Perfect. Richie's been wanting to get some things off his chest.

"How pathetic, right? All this time, I was banging your mom when I really just wanted to bang you. Sorry, that was shitty of me. Your mom was the worst but she's still your mom. I guess I just like pressing your buttons because at least that way I'd have your attention. It's all I really wanted, you know? The other guys, they're all fucking insane for putting up with me, but you? I wanted all of your attention. I was greedy for it and you were so willing to give."

Richie pulls the plush stopper out of the bell and catches the clapper. He leans back against the rocks, holding the bell carefully. Eddie's body is slumping towards him, and with a little maneuvering, Richie gets Eddie's head resting against his chest. There, if he wakes up with a start, he won't bang his head on the rocks.

"This is nice," he continues. "We used to cuddle a lot. Hey, you know that heterosexual guy friends don't *actually* secretly cuddle each other all the time like I told you they did, right? God, you were so gullible. Sorry, I guess I shouldn't have lied. What can I say? I told you, I was greedy for you. Still am. But now you've got a wife and a life away from me, and I bet you're eager to get back to them. Ain't that a bitch for me. That's okay- well, no, it's not. But it'll have to be."

Carefully, Richie raises the bell upright and lets go of the clapper. It hangs still, barely swaying. There's no breeze in Death to worry about. He drapes his free arm over Eddie's shoulder and closes his eyes.

"I think it'll be enough, to know you're still alive," Richie murmurs. He thinks enough time has passed since Bev and Stan left. "And if I fuck this up, well, I guess we'll just stay here until the end of creation. It's been a hell of a ride, Kaspbrak. See you on the other side."

A memory. His sweetest memory of Eddie. Which one? Pennywise took so many of them, and they're only just starting to return.

Besides, there are so many sweet ones: summers chasing each other around the outskirts of Derry, curled up in the hammock reading comic books, sneaking into each other's rooms late at night to slip under the sheets together and giggle or cry, depending on the context. Sneaking notes in class about how Becky Long's perm looked like shit, getting caught and ending up with detention together because of it. Catching a frog in the river and arguing over who got to take it home until it escaped. Watching *Point Break* in the theater on opening weekend, feeling funny about the way Johnny Utah and Bodhi gaze intensely at each other, and noticing how warm Eddie's arm was next to his own, how he'd like to close the last few inches between their hands on the armrest.

How can Richie pick one? It's impossible. The sum of his love for Eddie isn't in one moment, but in a thousand.

So, he doesn't bother trying. He just sweeps the bell out, because it feels right, and the clapper hits the inside, producing a pure, bright sound. Sweeps it back, and another pure note, as memories burst forth.

Eddie smiling at him over a picnic bench, Eddie tackling him into the river, Eddie falling back laughing at one of his dumb jokes, Eddie meeting his eyes across the bleachers as they watch a little league game.

Eddie delighted and beaming, Eddie angry and earnest, Eddie wild

and free.

Eddie, Eddie, Eddie.

Richie doesn't realize he's still ringing the bell until he feels a hand catch the clapper and lip of the bell, stilling the sound.

"Richie, enough with the bell already, for fuck's sake."

"Fuck, Eds!" Richie yelps, opening his eyes to see ones full of life glaring up at him.

"Hey, asshole," Eddie says. "Took you long enough."

Eddie's hand on his chest is warm, and his face is so close that Richie wants to just lean down and kiss him. He almost does. But then he remembers the bell. They should probably take care of that first, since it's still highly dangerous. He has to slide his arm away from Eddie's shoulder so he can grab the clapper before Eddie releases it. Eddie pulls away as he does so. Carefully, Richie flips the bell upside down and pushes the stopper in.

"Why were you ringing that shit in my ear?" Eddie asks, frowning and looking around. "Also, where the fuck are we?"

"What's the last thing you remember?" Richie asks, tucking the bell into the front of his backpack.

"I remember the cave, and then there was this big fucking river and I should have been able to get up and get my feet under me, but I couldn't. Then I was going down a waterfall, and- shit." He swallows, looking at Richie. "We killed It, right? I swear to god, before I- died? I remember you all killing it."

Richie nods. "We got that fucker, Eds. It's dead... but so are you."

"Oh. Are you fucking kidding me! Wait, so are you-

"Nope. Still alive. Came to get you."

"You serious, Rich? Why the fuck-

"Don't ask that question like you don't already know the answer, asshole," Richie says, jabbing Eddie in the chest. "Bev's here too. Apparently getting hit by the dead lights is the magic needed to come here while you're alive. Oh, yeah, we also found Stan."

"You *what*? Where the fuck is he?" Eddie tries to get to his feet, yelping when they give out underneath him. Richie has to lunge forward and catch him so he doesn't hit the rocks. "Shit."

"Take it easy, dickwad." It's easy to fall back in the routine of insulting each other, easy and comfortable and safe. Richie hates himself a little, but that's not new. "Hold on, let me help."

With a little guiding, he gets them both back on their feet, Eddie gripping Richie's waist for support. This is nice too. He's such a bastard, getting off on Eddie swooning against him like a damsel in distress. But he'll take what he can get right now.

"I think I'll be okay in a few minutes," Eddie says, taking deep breaths. "Shit, that water looks like a germ-infested sewer. We really gotta swim in that mess?"

"Eds, you're dead, you absolute moron," Richie says. "Let's get you back into your body first before we worry about you catching anything."

"You don't know that it's not dangerous, Richie. If this place is supposed to be where the dead go, how many rotting corpses do you think ended up in there? Oh my god, I definitely swallowed some of that shit, I think I'm gonna be sick- hey, hey why are you laughing, asshole?!"

Richie lets out great gasping guffaws, pulling Eddie to him in a tight hug. "I missed you so fucking much, shortie. Your mom was inconsolable, but I was there for her."

"Dude, my mom's dead, can you not? That's like, so fucking heartless." Eddie squirms out of Richie's embrace, but keeps his hands gripped tight around his elbows. "Could you be serious for once in your fucking life?"

"Fuck no! Who do you think I am?"

"The guy who went diving into the fucking underworld to find me, asshole. So, I don't think it's wrong for me to assume there's some genuine feelings involved!"

Richie rolls his eyes, tries to close off. "Oh, you wanna talk about feelings right now? Enjoying your stay in Hell, are you? Yeah, let's have a seat and chat some more, I'm sure there's nothing dangerous that wants to kill us out there."

"You're not getting out of this, Richie," Eddie says, glaring. "But yeah, let's get the fuck out of here."

Notes for the Chapter:

I was thinking about splitting this chapter up... but I figured you guys deserved some good feels, after all the sadness so far :)

10. Chapter 10

Eddie feels good enough to walk on his own after a few minutes, but they keep their hands linked while they push back upstream, just in case there's a rogue wave or one of them loses their footing. At least that's what Richie tells himself. It's not like he's enjoying holding Eddie's hand, or anything, like some lovesick teenager.

(Oh, he absolutely does).

"Hey bozos!" Eddie shouts when they spot Stan and Bev sitting on the rocks. "Miss me?"

"You haven't been gone long enough to miss, Kaspbrak!" Bev shouts. She jumps into the water and sprints over, wrapping him in a hug.

"Hey, hey, arms off the twink, Marsh," Richie teases, grinning when Eddie scowls at him. "Come on, she can't claim all the men. That's, like, homophobia."

Eddie frowns. "Against who, exactly?"

"Seriously?" Stan says. "Richie, how the fuck does he not know-"

"*Moving on!*" Richie yelps.

Bev and Stan report that they've been looking through the book for ideas on the safest way to get them all back to Life. The spell to part the wall of mist between the fourth and third Precincts is the same in both directions, but Richie is worried about how they'll conquer the massive tidal wave again, until Bev points out that it was created from the frozen water in the second Gate, and with all the water collapsed back into the third Precinct, the wave no longer exists. Probably. This stupid fucking place would pull something petty like that.

"I'm less concerned about the third Precinct than the second one," Bev says. "We know Pennywise is up there somewhere, and we lost the sword, so we'll have no idea where he is until we're right up on him."

"We can't let him back into the first Precinct, either," Stan says. He's

caught the gist of what's going on pretty quickly, with the help of the book. He's always been a quick study. "If Pennywise makes it back into Life, he might go right back to what he was doing."

"He would need a body," Richie points out. "I think we probably took care of that."

"Maybe not," Stan retorts. "He might just need to get out there to make a new one. Or maybe he wouldn't need it at all."

"What the fuck are you saying, Stan?" Eddie asks. "You saying that shithead could come back? Because that's just- that's not okay, like at all! We fucking beat his ass, we won! That's just bullshit!"

"Calm down, short stuff," Richie says, patting the top of Eddie's head, so that it comes off as condescending instead of what he actually wants, which is to touch Eddie all over and make sure he's still here and whole. "I think I have an idea about that. Two, in fact. Give me the book."

Richie finds what he's looking for in S's notes about the bells. "So, this one, Kibeth. It can make the Dead walk through the next gate, right? So, all we gotta do is ring it when Pennywise is nearby and command him to go through the second Gate. Then, we release the waves and it'll drag him all the way to the third Gate. And we'll leave this one open, so he gets thrown straight through. Hopefully, that's enough to keep him trapped down here."

"What if he makes his way back up?" Eddie asks.

"I don't think he will," Stan says. "Richie's right. If Pennywise could've made it up to the first Precinct, he would've done it by now. He needs us to get out."

"The other option is Sanareth," Richie says, slipping his finger down the page to the sixth bell's description. "It forces the listener to yield to the wielder's will. But I don't know if it'll affect everyone like Ranna does. Whoever rings it could end up sending everyone else back through the gate."

"So, we'll plug our ears," Eddie suggests. "You guys brought earplugs,

right?"

"Correctomundo, Eduardo, but if we can't track Pennywise by sight, how are we supposed to do it without hearing? If we use Kibeth, we only have to plug your and Stan's ears, and Bev and I can listen for him."

"Richie's right- wow, that's a sentence I hate to use," Bev says, ignoring how Richie flips her off. "I'll hold onto Ranna and use it if I absolutely have to. Stan, Eddie, if I ring that bell, Richie and I and Pennywise will all fall asleep, so you'll have to keep us from going through the gate. Got it?"

"I don't like this at all," Eddie complains. "You guys get the bells and Stan and I have to wear earplugs? We should have some way of protecting ourselves."

"You can have the switchblades we have in our bags," Bev says. "That enough?"

"No," Eddie grumbles. "But I guess I don't have much of a say."

"Take five minutes to gather yourselves," Stan says. "I'm going to read as much as I can, maybe pick up some spells."

"Of course you'd jump at the chance to learn magic," Richie says smugly. "You always wanted to be the wizard when we played D&D."

Stan wrinkles his nose. "Who wouldn't, Richie?"

"Me. Barbarian forever, man." Richie fixes his hand into devil horns and waggles his tongue. He slings an arm around Eddie's shoulders, rustling his hair. "And Tiny Tim over here was our twitchy little rogue."

Eddie squirms, trying to get away. "Hey, come on, leave the hair alone, Rich! I don't know what your hands are covered in."

"Oh, you don't? See, I let Pennywise take a shit all over my hands earlier, so-"

"Fuck off, asshole!"

Eventually, Richie stops giving Eddie hell and takes a moment to step away from the group, letting them account for supplies and divvy them out. He needs a minute to himself.

Everything is happening so fast now. Has it really been less than a day since they killed It? There's no sun to track in Death, and he didn't bring a watch. It probably wouldn't work here.

He sits on a large rock and picks up a few flat stones lying at his feet. They skip suspiciously well across the water, disappearing into the fog. Richie suspects they might just keep going and going forever.

"Hey, Richie." Eddie appears and sits down next to him. Their knees bump together, arms brushing as Eddie finds his balance on the seat. "You really came down here just to find me?"

"Of course I did," Richie says, throwing another stone. "What kind of fucking stupid question is that?"

"It's not stupid! You're risking your life to save mine. If I was in your position, I wouldn't."

"Yeah, you would," Richie says. He reaches over and presses a stone into Eddie's palm. "You already did, remember?"

Eddie turns the stone between his fingers, frowning. "Oh. You mean?"

"Yeah."

"With the dead lights and shit?"

"Bingo."

"So, this is like some kind of guilt thing? I saved you but died doing it, so you have to pay me back?"

"If that's how you want to look at it, yeah, man."

"How do you look at it?"

Richie sighs, dropping the rest of the stones. "I don't know, Eds. Maybe because you're my fucking best friend and we always watch

out for each other? Maybe because I didn't see you for twenty-seven years and having to watch you die after just finding you again was the worst moment of my life? Maybe because going the rest of my life without you just didn't seem worth it? Any of those answers satisfy you?"

Eddie doesn't say anything. Richie looks at him, and then wishes he hadn't. There's an uncomfortable vulnerability etched into Eddie's frown, a searching gaze in his eyes, as if Richie's a book in a language he's starting to become fluent in.

Richie's fist is resting on the rock between them, and Eddie's hand moves to cover it. Richie swallows. It's impossible to look away now.

All the aching want he has for this man is on the precipice of crumbling his resolve, and he starts to lean in as Eddie's eyelids droop low, with a lazy seductive quality, and he mumbles, "Richie..."

"Hey!" Stan shouts, and they both jump apart like frightened deer. "You guys ready to go?"

"Uh, yeah, totally!" Eddie squeaks, shooting to his feet and giving Richie a look before stomping over to Stan.

Richie groans and kicks the rest of the stones into the water.

Notes for the Chapter:

Ahahaha so yet again I've gone far too long without posting a chapter. Fear not! Only 4 left now!

11. Chapter 11

They've juggled the equipment around for the return back to Life. Bev is still wearing the bandolier, but Eddie's wearing her backpack to make it easier for her to move in the water. Stan has taken one of the ropes from the bag and tied it around the book, creating loops so he can wear it like a backpack. Richie has no idea how he's done it; Stan was in the Boy Scouts with Bill, not him. But it makes Richie's own pack lighter, which is nice. They'll need to be light as possible if they need to make a run for it.

They break through the wall of mist that makes up the Third Gate and find themselves in a Third Precinct that's flooded up to their necks with still water. Richie hates being tall sometimes, but not when he has dry shoulders and Eddie is glaring at him as he tries to avoid swallowing any of the stuff they're swimming in. Bev, even shorter, is holding onto Stan's shoulder to keep above the surface.

"You guys, I think my next vacation is going to be to the desert," Richie quips. "You think the Sahara is nice this time of year? Or maybe space, space doesn't have water, I could afford one of those Virgin space travel flights." Eddie spurts out water and curses as the motion from Stan's hand across the surface splashes him in the face. Richie rolls his eyes and grabs Eddie's hand, pulling him over to grab Richie's shoulder. "I didn't come find your dead ass just to watch you drown, moron."

"Bite me," Eddie grumbles.

Yes please, Richie thinks, but doesn't say.

When they finally make it to the end of the Precinct, there's a small tornado of water spinning freely in the air; Bev speaks the spell and the water level recedes around them, sucked up into the tornado, which then freezes over. They hike their way up the whirlpool stairs, puffing breaths the only noise as they reach the precipice and climb down into the water of the Second Precinct.

Then, as they've planned, Stan and Eddie stick in their earplugs and give thumbs up. Bev removes Kibeth from its pouch first and hands it

to Richie. He gets an unsettling shiver just from touching the metal; for a moment, he's tempted to ask for Sanareth instead, but there's no time to second guess things. They have to do it this way. Bev takes out Ranna, nodding to them all, and they begin moving forwards.

Richie and Bev take the flanks with Stan and Eddie in the middle, since they can't hear anything. They each grip the shoulder of the person next to them, and whenever Richie or Bev hears something, they squeeze the shoulder, and that person squeezes the shoulder of the person next to them, and so on. In this way, they're able to keep their tight line, breaking silently through the knee-high water.

Something hisses to Richie's left and he freezes, digging his nails into Eddie's shoulder. Eddie lets go of him and fumbles in the backpack, which he's carrying on his front (god, a loser indeed) for the flashlight. He flicks it on, shooting the beam in the direction Richie motions towards. It's only then that Richie remembers science class, and driver's ed, and why you don't put on your high beams when it's foggy outside: the light scatters through the vapor of the fog, lighting up the fog but nothing else.

"Fuck, put that away," Stan hisses. "You'll give our location away."

"*Sorry, sorry,*" Eddie whispers. He turns off the light, but keeps the flashlight in his hand, gripping it like a cudgel.

Richie pokes Eddie's shoulder and motions for him to pull out an earplug for a second.

"You gonnnna brain Pennywise with that, Eds?" Richie whispers to him as they continue forward. "Not sure you've got enough muscle in you; it'll bounce right off."

"Would you shut up, Richie?" Eddie hisses. "And I'll have you know, I'm plenty strong. I lift weights at the gym three times a week and I could carry your out-of-shape ass over my shoulder if I had to!"

Richie tries to purr, but it's so quiet, it comes out more as stunted cough.

Eddie raises an eyebrow. Richie shrugs.

"If you two will stop flirting," Bev mutters. "And listen for the *murder clown*? Kaspbrak, put that fucking earplug back in."

Eddie shoots Richie a look that says *See? You got me in trouble* and jams the earplug back in.

Not thirty seconds later, there's a splash off to their right. They freeze again, barely breathing. A noise from behind them makes them twist around, still seeing nothing through the fog.

"Maybe we should just confront It," Bev whispers. "Get it out in the open."

Richie is about to list all the reasons that's a terrible idea when a thick clawed tentacle whips out of the fog, striking them all across the chest and sending them spinning into the water. Richie gasps as he lands on his ass, water splashing up over his face and glasses. Through the haze of water, he sees the outline of Beverly raising Ranna to ring, but the tentacle slashes across the side of her arm, making her drop the bell straight down into the water.

"Bev!" Another tentacle whips out towards her, but Stan catches it with the flashlight, smacking it away while he drags her backwards. Eddie is on his feet, scrambling towards them. Richie attempts to get to his feet, only to have them knocked out from under him by another tentacle. This time he falls forward, face-planting into the water. He doesn't even have time to yell before the appendage wraps around his legs and drags him down onto the riverbed. He's pulled backwards through the sand, clawing at the riverbed uselessly, before being dragged back to the surface, hanging upside down as he sputters and coughs up water.

"Richie!" he hears Eddie scream, and he opens his eyes to see the group of his inverted friends huddled together in the water. He's dazed, can't focus, and his glasses are hanging at an angle where he can't see shit.

Fear spikes through him as a sharpened point drags dangerously across his throat, and an unholy sound roars through his eardrums.

"Oh, fuck, oh *shit*," Richie groans. "Why upside down?"

"What's it doing?" Eddie yells, motioning towards something Richie can't see.

It roars again. Bev's injured arm is bleeding and hanging limply from her side, so she presses her other hand to her chest and says, "I think it's pointing... to me? I don't know why though." The next sound isn't a roar so much as a shrieking hiss.

"Now It's pointing at It's throat," Stan says. "What does it want?"

"Sh-shit, Marsh, the- the fucking one bell we haven't used," Richie groans. "The one that lets Dead things talk."

"It wants to talk to us? No fucking way!" Eddie shouts. "Why should we help It?"

Richie whimpers as the claw pushes into the hollow of his throat, and a trickle of blood runs down and up his chin. "If you don't, I'm about to spend some permanent time down here, that's why!" he shouts.

Beverly scrambles for the fourth pouch, yanking the bell out. She raises it and sounds it towards the creature, whose gurgling hiss turns into a disturbing laugh as It regains Its voice.

"*Oh, Beverly, that's a good girl,*" It says. "*I knew you'd all come. Poor Richie just can't help himself, can he?*"

"Eat shit," Richie growls, gasping when the claw digs deeper. "F-fuck!"

"Let him go!" Eddie yells, shaking the flashlight. "You're dead, what the fuck's it matter anymore?"

"*Eddie boy, you don't know?*" It cackles, and Richie yells as the tentacle whips him around to face It. Now Richie can see the wrinkled greyish brown skin, the spiky clawed hands, and the flower blossom mouth drooling with rows and rows of teeth. "*What about youuuuu, Richie?*" It asks, throat bobbing and lips twisting in a cruel imitation of human speech.

"Know what?" Richie asks, feeling woozy from all the blood rushing to his head.

"Life, Richie!" It giggles. "You brought me Life! You and Beverleeeeeeeey. That's all I need to get back!"

A sick feeling settles in Richie's stomach.

"The fuck..." he gasps.

It shrieks a laugh again, parting Its lips, showing off rows and rows of teeth; Richie sees the barest hint of yellow light at the back of his throat and jams his eyes shut. He shudders when a slimy, wet thing licks up the side of his face.

"RICHIE!" Eddie screams. God, this is like some sick reversal of before. He's going to die and Eddie is gonna watch it happen, and then he's going to have died for nothing, and Richie will never get to tell him the truth, and It will probably get reborn and all his friends will fight It again and this time they'll all probably die, and there's nothing he can do.

His whole body tenses as Its hot breath blows across him. Richie realizes he's been an entire idiot.

He also realizes he's still holding Kibeth.

Oh. *Shit*.

With all his strength, Richie whips the bell back and forth, yelling, "GO THROUGH THE GATE, THROUGH THE GATE, PENNYWISE!"

Richie feels Pennywise jerk, a confused growl bubbling up out of Its throat as It stumbles forward. He doesn't stop ringing the bell, even as his friend start shouting, even as he feels the creature stumble into a run, roaring in his ears, still holding him as it charges down the river.

The screaming stops when they hit the water, Pennywise diving into the whirlpool of the Second Gate and dragging Richie down with him. It loses Its grip on Richie, and he tries to swim upwards, but he's not strong enough, the twisting current pulling Richie down and down and down, so fast and whipping that he nearly blacks out from the pressure, until he's spat out into a body of water.

Dazed, Richie feels the bottom of the river and pushes himself up, gasping and coughing as he breathes the surface of the Third Precinct. He can hear Pennywise shrieking in anger somewhere a ways off. His hands are empty; Kibeth disappeared somewhere down the whirlpool, and he doubts he'll have time to find it.

If his friends are smart, they'll leave him here. Pennywise will give chase, and since they left the next gate open, Richie can run through that and keep going, maybe through the Fourth Gate and beyond.

Something will probably catch him eventually, murder him gruesomely. But as long as Pennywise keeps following, as long as he's trapped down here, and can't hurt anyone else, well...

That'll have to be enough.

Richie steadies himself on the riverbed, glancing around. He tenses up, ready to run, but before he can, something else splashes down into the water behind him.

After a moment, Stan's head breaks the surface.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Richie yells.

"Saving your ass for the last time, Richie," Stan says, wading over to him. "Listen, I've decided. I shouldn't have left you all to do the hard work, offing myself like that. It's time I made it up to you."

"Well, gee, glad you decided to join the party, Stanley," Richie says. "So, what's the plan?"

"The plan is that you put these earplugs in, and get under the water," Stan says, holding them out in his palm. "After that, I'm going to ring this."

He lifts a bell the size of a canning jar out of the water.

It's the largest one, the eight bell. Astarel. The Banisher.

Sends all who hear it deep into Death, including the wielder.

"No," Richie says. "Stan, you can't."

"We're out of options," Stan says. "With this, I can drag Pennywise all the way down to the Ninth Gate. He'll never get back out."

"But neither will you, Stan!" Richie yelps, grabbing his shoulders and shaking them. "You get that, don't you? You'll be dead, permanently! We're so close to Life and you want to just give up?"

Stan smiles. "I'm not giving up, Richie. Just accepting the reality. I'm already dead, permanently. I've been dead for days this point. My body's in the midst of rotting, and most likely, it's been autopsied and had everything removed and filled with formaldehyde. I can't go back."

"But- Mike has this weird fucking healing thing he can do," Richie insists. "We can just use that, and then you'll be okay."

"What if I don't want to go back?" Stan asks, looking up at him earnestly. "What if I'm just okay with this?"

"Well I'm not!" Richie shouts at him angrily. "Fuck you, man! This isn't funny!"

Stan says nothing, but he steps forward and wraps his arms around Richie, embracing him.

Richie crumbles instantly, burying his face in Stan's shoulder and hugging him fiercely.

"It's okay, Richie," Stan murmurs. "I'm okay. I had a good life. I got to see you and Eddie and Bev again, and we stopped Pennywise. I want to do this for you."

"You have a wife. People who love you up there, man," Richie says, swallowing. "You have us."

"I know," Stan replies. "But I want to see what comes next. What's beyond that Gate. Don't you, someday? I think it sounds exciting. I'll miss you all, but you'll join me in time."

"That's morbid as fuck," Richie says, the humor hanging dead in his voice. "You get your wife all hot and bothered, talking like that?"

"Disgusting, Richie," Stan says, pulling back and smiling at him fondly. "Never change."

"I love you, man," Richie says. "Like, as a friend."

"I love you too, Richie," Stan says. "You were the closest thing I ever had to a brother."

Then he reaches up and presses the earplugs into Richie's ears.

Richie watches Stan wade out farther into the water. Stan opens his mouth, and Richie sees his lips move as he starts shouting, calling out for his target. He stops suddenly, twisting around to the left and raising the bell out of the water.

Richie drops his feet out from under him and plunges under the surface, kicking down as far as he can and covering his ears for good measure. He stays down until his lungs can't take it anymore.

When he breaks the surface again, Stan is gone. Richie pops out the earplugs.

"Stan?" he calls out.

Silence.

It's only then that he lets himself start to cry. Quiet, shivering sobs, hands over his mouth, mourning in a way he hasn't been able to until now.

He whips around when he hears the familiar crackling of ice, and the water recedes as the Second Gate sucks it up and freezes behind him. The stairs appear at the very end, and after a few moments, so does Eddie.

"Richie!" Eddie shouts, jumping off the last two steps into the water. He runs towards Richie, slowing down the closer he gets, until he comes to a stop right in front of him.

"H-hey, Eds," Richie says softly, sniffing and wiping his eyes. "Stan-Stan's gone."

"Yeah," Eddie says, nodding. "He told us what he was going to do."

"And you were okay with that?" Richie asks miserably.

Eddie shuffles his feet, looking down. "No. Of course not. But it was the only way to get you back."

"It's not fair," Richie insists. "Eds, it's not-"

"I know, Rich. I know." Eddie swallows and holds a hand out. "Come on. Let's go home."

Richie takes his hand.

Notes for the Chapter:

Like it says in the tags. Stanley Uris is a good friend.

12. Chapter 12

The journey back to the First Precinct is silent, except for the sound of water and Bev chanting spells quietly to let them pass through the First Gate.

Richie steps out over the waterfall and into the shallow waters of the First Precinct, looking around. The waters are empty of any dead things, and the light feels brighter, warmer. Up ahead, he can see the glowing horizon. It feels closer than it had when they arrived.

In the distance, a lone figure stands, facing the horizon, silhouetted in the light.

"Stan?" Richie says, bolting forwards. "Hey! I think it's Stan!"

It isn't Stan. As Richie gets closer, the figure turns to reveal a feminine face with pale white skin, dark eyes and bobbed hair as black as the darkest night Richie can remember. She's wearing a thick blue tunic, tied with a plain brown belt, and brown slacks underneath it. The whole ensemble makes her look like a flapper girl who does LARPing on the weekends.

"Who the fuck is that, Rich?" Eddie mutters warily.

"The fuck if I know," Richie mutters back. "Bev, you got anything?"

"No clue," she says, wincing as she shifts her arm in the makeshift sling they made out of Richie's plaid shirt. "She doesn't look too dangerous, though. Let's talk to her."

The woman seems to be waiting for them; she stands silently, arms folded, expression neutral as they approach and stop in front of her.

"Hi," Richie says. "I'm Richie. This is Eddie. That's Bev."

"Are you looking for something? Or someone?" Bev asks.

The woman frowns. "Someone... No. I'm here because it's where I should be."

"Okay," Eddie says. "That tells us nothing."

The woman looks over at Bev, and her eyes go wide. "My bells, why are they here?"

"Your bells?" Richie puts two and two together quickly, sometimes. "So you're the Abhorsen? The one who wrote the book?"

The woman nods. "I am. You may call me Sabriel."

"Nice to meet you," Eddie says, with a tone that implies otherwise. "If you'll excuse us, we've got places to be."

Sabriel holds out a hand before Eddie can move past her.

"Hold on," she says, motioning to him. "You're dead. You should be heading the other way."

"Oh fuck no, lady," Eddie says. "I've seen what's down there, believe me, I'm good. Got a few more years up on Earth before I need to go back."

Sabriel looks at him, then to Bev and Richie. "You're bringing him back to Life? It isn't a good pattern to set, finding the dead and bringing them back."

"It's not a pattern," Richie says, edging slightly in front of Eddie. What if this woman decides she's going to take Eddie back down the river? She wrote the fucking book on this place, how would they stop her? "Look, it's just him, okay? He's the only one we're here for. How about this, you can have the stupid bells back, if you want. Then we won't be able to come back. Deal?"

Sabriel looks him up and down, considering.

"I think that's fair," she says. "Yes, that works."

They hand over the bandolier, and Sabriel loops it over herself, frowning when she checks the pouches.

"Where's Ranna? And Kibeth? And Astarael?"

"We lost them," Bev explains. "Ranna should be in the Precinct below here, and Kibeth below that, if they haven't washed away. As for Astarael... one of our friends used it."

"He's dead though," Richie says, shrugging. "Wanted to stay that way too. Oh, and, the sword's gone too. Sorry. Oh shit, and Stan had the book with him, didn't he? Damn, we're not good at holding onto things."

"I see," Sabriel says. "Well, maybe that is why I'm here. I will make collecting what you've lost my next task."

"Cool," Richie says, nodding like he has any idea what she plans on doing. "So, uh, one more favor." He points to the rushing headwaters of the horizon. "Think you could help us get through there?"

"I think so," Sabriel replies, raising her hand and muttering something as she slices it down. Immediately, the water in front of them parts to reveal the riverbed and a dry path back towards the horizon. "Does that work?"

"It's perfect," Bev says. "Thank you."

"Ready, Eddie?" Richie asks. "I can't promise we didn't get you any weird tattoos or take pictures of your body in compromising positions while you were gone."

Eddie rolls his eyes. "Fuck off, Richie," he says, flipping him the bird but smirking as he steps onto the dry path.

"You two go ahead," Bev says, motioning. "I've got one more favor to ask."

"You sure, Bev?" Richie asks.

She nods. "I'll only be a moment after you. It's just... Stan."

Oh. Yeah. That's a good favor.

Eddie reaches back and takes Richie's hand again.

"Let's go, Rich," he says. "If you really did get me tattooed, I'm going

to fucking kill you."

~

Richie opens his eyes to Bill peering at him, face mere inches away.

"Jesus, fuck, Bill," Richie snaps, stumbling back. "Mind warning me the next time you want to investigate my pores up close?"

"S-sorry, Richie," Bill says. "Oh, f-fuck, you came back!"

"Richie?" Mike comes into view next, frowning at him. "Man, what the fuck did you do? You've been gone for like eight hours!"

"Damn, time moves fast in the underworld," Richie snarks, glancing to his right and jerking when he sees Bev standing there, arm outstretched, unmoving, frozen.

No, *literally* frozen. There are icicles clinging to her skin and permafrost dusting her hair.

"What the fuck?" Richie asks rhetorically.

"You were like that too," Mike explains. "We thought about trying to warm you up, but we weren't sure if that would fuck up what you were doing."

"Richie." Ben's hand lands on his shoulder, and Richie twists around, looking up into a very unhappy expression. "Why are you back and she's not?"

Richie pales. "She's right behind me, Ben, I swear to God. Please don't squeeze me to death with your giant man hands. Squish porn is definitely not one of my kinks."

Ben rolls his eyes, sighing. "Fine, but if she's not back in the next two minutes-"

They all jump as the icicles on Bev's skin crack and crash to the floor, the water vanishing instantly as she lands hard on her foot, cursing. "Didn't stick the landing well," she says as Ben swoops around Richie to grab her waist and steady her. Richie snorts. Fucking loverboy.

"Uh, you guys? Anybody care that I'm back too?" Eddie sits up, wincing and patting across his chest. "Ow. Feels like I got hit by a truck."

Bill, Ben and Mike tackle Eddie back onto the table, yelping and shouting with joy like the kids they once were. Eddie complains loudly about the manhandling, but no one cares, suffocating him with affection anyway. Bev moves to join them, but Richie hangs back, watching the scene, savoring it.

Nothing beats the warm glow in his chest, the sense of relief. It's finally over. Eddie's alive. He's safe. That's all Richie wanted.

Well, maybe not all, but...

Eddie swings his legs off the table, standing carefully and stretching his limbs. "Oof, good to be back inside you, buddy," he says, patting his sides.

Richie snickers, and he can't help himself. "You say that to your wife too, Eds?"

"No! Oh, shit! Myra," Eddie says. "Fuck. You guys didn't tell her I was dead, right?"

"We hadn't gotten to that part," Ben says. "Really glad we don't have to worry about it anymore."

"Yeah. I'm s-sure, she'll b-be g-glad to have you h-home, Eddie," Bill says, clapping him on the shoulder.

Eddie's smile is thin. "Yeah. I'm sure."

The air feels like it's been sucked out of the room, as Richie lets out a weak chuckle, eyes looking anywhere but Eddie.

"Yeah," Richie says. "Can't forget that."

"Richie?" Mike asks. "You alright?"

"Yeah, I- uh. I'm just tired," Richie lies. "That whole thing took a lot out of me. Think I'm gonna go get some sleep."

"Are you sure?" Bev asks, eyes filled with concern. He hates that she probably knows exactly why he's reacting like this. "Maybe you should stay."

"Nope, sorry, I really need to go," Richie says, stepping back towards the door.

"Richie?" Eddie asks.

"I'll- I'll see you all back at the hotel in the morning," Richie says, sweeping from the room in a rush.

If there are footsteps that follow, and if someone calls his name, well, he just ignores it. There's no point, is there? He did what he set out to do. He saved Eddie. His work here is done. Now Eddie can go back to his wife and his fancy New York apartment, and Richie can go back to his quiet, lonely studio in LA, and they can move on. Nothing ties them together anymore.

He's doing the right thing. Richie's feelings aren't Eddie's problem. They never have been.

But why, he thinks, racing down the stairs, why does doing the right thing feel so wrong?

Notes for the Chapter:

One more chapter folks, I promise good things are ahead. Thank you so much to everyone who keeps reading, commenting and giving this little fic attention <3